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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Sydney Kent House

AND/OR COMMON

St. James Convent

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

2944 South Michigan Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

1st

STATE

Illinois

CODE

COUNTY

Cook

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENC
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

St. James Parish/Catholic Bishop of Chicago

STREET & NUMBER

2920 South Wabash

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

VICINITY OF

STATE

Illinois

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Cook County Recorder of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

County Building, 118 North Clark Street

CITY, TOWN

Chicago, Illi

STATE

Illinois

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Illinois Historic Structures Survey
Illinois Historic Landmarks Survey

DATE

1975

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Illinois Department of Conservation

CITY, TOWN

Springfield

Illinois

STATE

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Sydney Kent house at 2944 South Michigan Avenue, currently the St. James Convent, is part of a complex of buildings which form the St. James Parish. Bordering Michigan Avenue is a tall iron fence fixed to a black granite curb. Two gates lead from the sidewalk to the house, one serves as front entrance and the other opens into a carriageway that passes through the porte-cochere. The entrance to the house is emphasized by a central dormer which ends in a decorative terra-cotta pinnacle. The surface of all facades is red Philadelphia brick. Red panels of a floral terra-cotta accentuate the walls. Red sandstone is used for the base.

The first floor has two parlors, one on either side of the entrance vestibule and central corridor. Beyond these parlors, the central hall widens. To the left is the library, straight ahead the dining room and kitchen wing, and to the right, the main staircase. The decorative features of the hall are the wooden wainscot and the elaborate ceiling of exposed beams and inlaid woods. Sliding doors lead to the parlors, library and dining room. The south parlor is the most elaborate room with a round bay window having a transom above it of stained glass. The room is also illuminated by a large window of leaded and beveled glass. The library is differentiated from the rest of the rooms by its angular bay window on the south wall, and the wood of the fireplace and built-in bookcases which is stained a light tone. The dining room now runs entirely across the rear of the house. Originally it took up about 1/2 of that space. Its form is still defined by a plaster cornice. A round bay window opens to the south with stained glass in its transom similar in color to the blue-green tile of the fireplace mantel. On the west wall there is another large stained glass window predominantly yellow in color that is flanked by two doors. The left door leads to an exterior porch while the right door connects with the kitchen wing. The fireplaces of all these rooms retain their original colorful tiles, wooden mantels and bronze hearths.

The main staircase leads down on the east side to the porte-cochere and up to the second and third floors. The rooms on these floors are used as bedroom suites with common bathroom facilities. One exceptionally fine suite on the third floor was the former ballroom. Its broad ceiling probably contained a fresco. Its original chandelier is in the room although it is not in working order. The room is lit by dormers and a narrow band of windows at its base.

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1882-1883

BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Wellborn Root

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As one of the very few early residences by the famous architect John Root still standing in Chicago, the house is of great significance. Its excellent condition and few changes, make also a model of prestige architecture in the best neighborhood of the city during the 1880's. The house is also distinguished as a very early example of true urban Queen Anne architecture in Chicago. Its historical associations with three of Chicago's millionaire families is also worthy of note.

HISTORY

Since the completion of this splendid house in 1883, it has been the exclusive residence of three wealthy and prominent Chicago families. In 1929 it became a religious institution. The first occupant was Sydney Kent and it is his initials that are seen in the terra-cotta on the front dormer. In 1897 he sold the house to John "Bet-a-milli Gates. He was the most socially prominent inhabitant, Financier, Founder of American Steel & Wire Co., and a man in pursuit of social acceptance, he lived here until his death in 1911, when the house was sold to M.D. Spades.

The decline of this residential area known as Douglas Park began in 1906 when Michigan Avenue between 12th and 26th Street became the automobile sales center of Chicago. At the time Spades sold the house and property in 1929, the house had not been lived in for several years.

Frank J. Lewis, a Chicago manufacturer, philanthropist and Catholic leader bought the house in 1929 and donated it to the church. It subsequently became a Catholic Youth Organization Home. During the depression it served as a temporary transient hotel housing 270 young men and boys. Many thousands of men were guests at the house until they could secure jobs and support themselves. By 1950 the house was officially occupied by the Sisters of the St. James Parish, who continue to use the Sydney Kent house as a residence.

John Wellborn Root of Burnham and Root was architect of the Sydney Kent house. As a partner of the architectural firm of Burnham and Root until his death in 1891, he remains one of Chicago's most famous and noted architects. Among the important commercial buildings designed by him are the Monadnock Building and the Rookery

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

These commercial structures and the Sydney Kent house share in common the use of red brick, terra-cotta and stone.

The neighborhood in which the house is located has undergone considerable change. From being part of the Gold Coast of Chicago it has decayed in the thirties and forties into slums and then been treated to a massive urban renewal scheme in the fifties. The house is now surrounded with low income projects, a middle income project, South Commons, what remains of the automobile showrooms, and the Illinois Institute of Technology.

